



Hawaii State Department of Health

Disease Investigation Branch

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Psittacosis

(ornithosis, parrot fever)

What is psittacosis?

Psittacosis is a disease associated with birds that can result in a flu-like illness or serious pneumonia in many people who become infected. The disease is caused by a tiny parasite called *Chlamydia psittaci*. Parrots, parakeets, and other birds can be carriers of the organism and can transmit the disease to humans. Psittacosis could also be used as a bioterrorist weapon.

How do you get psittacosis?

You get it from handling the blood, tissues, feathers, and wastes from infected birds. This might occur in pet shops, zoos, and slaughter houses. Infected birds could be obviously sick or apparently healthy. You can also get it indirectly by breathing in dust particles from the dried droppings of infected birds. Person-to-person spread is very rare.

What are the symptoms of psittacosis?

The symptoms of psittacosis may include fever, headache, rash, loss of appetite, vomiting, neck and back pain, muscle aches, chills, fatigue, upper and lower respiratory symptoms and cough. In severe cases, extensive pneumonia may develop and be fatal (rarely).

When do the symptoms start?

The symptoms commonly start 4 to 14 days after exposure to the blood, tissues, feathers, or droppings of infected birds. Birds can appear diseased or seemingly healthy and can shed the agent for weeks or months.

What is the treatment for psittacosis?

Medications can be prescribed by a doctor to treat psittacosis.

If you get psittacosis once, can you get it again?

Yes. There is no evidence that a person develops immunity to a repeated infection with this parasite.

How can you keep from getting it?

Avoid keeping birds as pets.

If birds are kept as pets, clean the cage frequently so that bird droppings do not dry up and become airborne when disturbed.

Do not buy, sell, trade, or handle birds of the parrot family imported from foreign countries without proof that they were placed in quarantine before being sold; **it is the law.**

For more information, see the CDC's website at <https://www.cdc.gov/pneumonia/atypical/psittacosis/index.html>